

**RACIAL DISCRIMINATION REFLECTED IN KENNY LEON'S
A RAISIN IN THE SUN MOVIE (2008):
A MARXIST APPROACH**



RESEARCH PAPER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Racism becomes serious problem in such condition of a country. Racism is the problem dealing with the different culture and colored skin, especially between the blacks and the whites. The blacks are always assumed as the minorities or inferior in society. In along history, they become poor people with the lack of knowledge and skill. They work as labors for the whites. In the other hand, the whites are always assumed as the rich people or wealth owner where sometimes the black people work for them. As the minorities in society, sometimes the blacks were being oppressed by the whites. This condition makes the social discrepancy between the blacks and the whites. The blacks are always been rejected by the whites. This condition can be seen in *A Raisin in the Sun* movie.

A Raisin in the Sun is a dramatic television movie directed by Kenny Leon and produced by John M. Eckert. This movie adapted from the teleplay by Paris Qualles is based on the award-winning 1959 play of the same name by Lorraine Hansberry. It is inspired by Langston Hughes's poet reflection that a deferred dream dries up like a raisin in the sun. This movie debuted at the 2008 Sundance Film Festival and was broadcast by ABC on February 25, 2008. It's running time at about 131 minutes. It was distributed by American Broadcasting Company (ABC) under Sony Pictures Television's control in USA. This film release date on February 25, 2008 on TV versions and May

13, 2008 on DVD. This film was produced in English. The process in making this movie takes place in Toronto, Ontario and Canada. This movie starring Sean Combs as Walter Lee Younger, Audra McDonald as Ruth Younger, Phylicia Rashad as Lena Younger, Sanaa Lathan as Beneatha Younger, Justin Martin as Travis Younger, and as minor characters are Sean Patrick Thomas as George Murchison, Davis Oyelowo as Joseph Asagai, Bill Nunn as Bobo, Ron C. Jones as Willy Harris, and John Stamos as Karl Lindner.

Kenny Leon who directed this movie was born in 1957. Kenny Leon is an African-American director notable for his work on Broadway and in regional theater. His success on Broadway has made him one of its foremost African-American directors. Since 1990, Kenny Leon has been artistic director of Atlanta's Alliance Theatre, the largest regional theater in the Southeast. Leon has brought its work to the fore of non-profit theater and has elevated its reputation to one of international significance. Before his tenure at the Alliance, Leon had trained and gained experience on the Atlanta stage for more than 15 years. He studied with Joan Lewis at Clark Atlanta University. He acted and directed under artistic director Frank Wittow at the Academy Theatre. Leon was raised by his grandmother in rural Tallahassee, Florida. His grandmother was a servant for white families in the city. In the mid-1970s Leon attended Clark Atlanta University, where he studied political science as a pre-law student, met his future wife, and developed his love of the theater. Joan Lewis, Leon's theater teacher, would become the most influential person in his life. While acting with the city's Academy Theatre, Leon became

romantically involved with a college friend, Carol Mitchell, who was also acting at the Academy. They married in 1987 on the main stage of the Academy Theatre and for years after, continued acting together.

Kenny Leon has gotten several Academic Awards, such as National Endowment for the Arts/ Theatre Communications Group Directing fellow, 1986; Bronze Jubilee Award for Theatre Excellence; Drum Major for Justice Award in the Arts, Southern Christian Leadership Council. Leon's career was so good. He follows in Academy Theatre, Atlanta, GA, actor and director, 1980-90; director of touring shows, Center Stage Theatre, Baltimore, MD, San Jose Repertory Theatre, San Jose, CA, Huntington Theatre Company, Boston University Theatre, Boston, MA, Goodman Theatre, Chicago, IL, late 1980s--; artistic director, Alliance Theatre Company, Atlanta, GA, 1990.

A Raisin in the Sun movie tells about the conflict of African American family with the black ghetto with their racism. They seek in better life by moving into a new house which happens to be located in white family community. Set in 1959, which legally separated the people living in the same country into superior white and inferior colored according to their skin color. This story focuses on the Younger, an African American family living on South Side, Chicago. They include Walter Lee Younger and Ruth, his wife; Walter's mother, Lena Younger; his sister, Beneatha Younger; and his son, Travis. They all live in a small apartment with three rooms, ones a combination of living room and kitchen with lights of sun from the one window, one bedroom for Walter and Ruth, one bedroom for Lena share with

Beneatha, and Travis sleeps on the coach in the living room which also serves as a dining room and is also part of the tiny kitchen. It is evident that this family is not well off.

Walter 35 years old is a chauffeur in white family that does not seem to acknowledge him as a human being. He feels that becoming a chauffeur is not a kind job. Like his father he does not want to be a servant. He has a dream to become more than a chauffeur. With his limited salary, he cannot fill the need of his family. He cannot make his family safe to stay in small apartment and cannot make his family feel happy. The big dream of him is to have a big business like the whites. So, he wants to invest the money in a liquor store and become a big businessman. He thinks if he has a big businessman he does not work for other people.

Ruth, Walter's wife, about 30 years old is a wise wife. She wants a change in her life. She has a dream to have a house with more space and sunlight enough. She works as an ironer for white family. She must work hard and finish her irons as soon as possible, because if the irons are not yet finished the white family will be angry with her. Ruth was pregnant. Without Walter knows, she wants to abort her pregnancy. Ruth is afraid she cannot keep her baby with the limited competence economically in her family. But Lena, her mother in law, forbids her to abort her pregnancy.

Lena Younger, Walter's mother is a stout, God-fearing woman in her early sixties. She is the ultimate support and final word in the home but she is still a good patriarchal mother in that she is willing to give it up to her

irresponsible son Walter. She works as a maid and she is loved by the little girl she cares for in white family, but she can quit that job now since she is getting 10,000 dollars life insurance check after the death of her husband. Beneatha is Walter's sister. She is a college student of medical school and an aspiring doctor. She has two potential romantic partners; George, who comes from a rich family and is about as black as Carlton Banks, and language professor Joseph Asagai, who wants to teach Beneatha about African cultures. She is interested in learning more about her African cultures, which she had left long time before. She learns African culture from Joseph Asagai, her friend who meets in college. Asagai is a Nigerian boy. He so much knows about African cultures. He is interested in Beneatha. George is also interested in Beneatha but Beneatha dislikes his willingness to submit to white culture and forget his African heritage. He challenges the thoughts and feelings of other black people through his arrogance and flair for intellectual competition.

Travis, Walter and Ruth's children is a student in elementary school. He is eleven years old. In his school with his friend from white family, he got scoffing from that black families (Negro) are always poor in the world history. He wants to prove for the white family that not always black family is poor. He wants to buy a book with the price 50 cent in his school to prove it. His parents does not give money for him because they do not have enough money to buy it. So, Travis wants to be carrying groceries in market, but do not get permit from his mother.

The conflict begins when Lena get insurance money after her husband died. She gets 10.000 dollars. She and all of her family hope all of their life can be changed by receiving the insurance 10.000 dollars. With her family condition, certainly thus money will be more important. Each of them has different dream with that money. Walter plans to join in a liquor business with his friends (Bobo and Willy) and not having to work for someone especially for the white family. According to Walter from this business he will get a lot of money. This would allow him to provide his family, something that seemed so important to him and his male ego. They think if he has a lot of money, he can buy a luxurious house, pay the Travis's school fee in elementary school, and Beneatha's school fee in college and makes Lena and Ruth happy.

Ruth wants to fulfill her dream by owning her own house with enough sunlight and leaving the apartment by that money. Their sadness at unfulfilled dreams overlain with the burden of Ruth's pregnancy gets out of hand when Walter asks Ruth who even cares about her. The two of them realize at that time that their relationship has dwindled to nothing but nagging and rude comments, all because of the value put into the money. They forgot how to just enjoy each other, something money cannot buy. Walter's mother had more responsible plans to invest in a home, for Travis school fee and Beneatha's medical school education.

Each of them has the different dream. It can make the condition of Younger family was not in romance. Walter keeps his wants and he becomes persevere with his mother. In the end, Lena unchanged her decided did not

give Walter permit to join that business. Then, Walter goes outside from the house leaves his family. As a mother, Lena not bring oneself to Walter who angry with her. Lena follows up Walter goes to the Bar. Lena gives advice for him. Lena wants to make Walter happy. She did not make him disappointed. So, Lena gives to Walter 65.000 dollars for his business. Walter invests all of that money (65.000 dollars) for his business to his friends, Bobo and Willy. Walter entrust the money to his friends and hopes this business will be success. While Lena buy a house with the price 35.000, in Clybourne Park elite complex of white family. Lena sees a great opportunity to move into a better neighborhood. But the people next door to the house she finds are all white and do not want the blacks moving in.

Eight days later after Lena buys an elite house, Carl Linder; the chairman of the welcoming committee of the Clybourne Park Improvement Association comes to the Youngers' apartment when they are packing for their movement to their new house. He wants to buy back the house that Lena bought because the residents of Clybourne Park believe "Negro families are happier when they live in their own communities". He is prepare to buy the house at a financial gain to the Younger family. He offered a lot of money. But they refuse his offer, of course, and usher him out. Nevertheless, he leaves his card behind.

Awhile later, one of Walter's friends, Bobo comes to Youngers' house. He is a partner in Walter's scheme to open a liquor store. Bobo delivers devastating news. Their other partner in the liquor store plan, Willy, has run

off with the money that Walter and Bobo gave him to start the business. Every cent is gone. The rest of the Youngers are not aware that Walter had decided to go through with his plan to invest in a liquor business. But they have not yet heard the worst of the news. After Bobo leaves, Walter confesses that he had entrusted Willy with the entire sum Mama gave him, including Beneatha's money.

Walter comes into the parlor, finds Lindner's business card, and telephones him to come over. Lindner had said he was willing to buy back the Youngers' house in the Clybourne Park for more than the price Lena agreed to pay for it. The extra money from Lindner would be Walter's way of trying to make up for his mistake. Walter hopes with that money, his family live will be changed after lost money 65.000 dollars. After further discussion, tense and angry, Walter is made to realize what is important in life. After Lindner arrives, Walter refuses his offer. They will be keep stay in their new house. They keep their self esteem as a black family. Finally, Younger family get move to their new house in the white family complex. They do not want to humiliate their self respect just for money. They want to prove that the black family is not always poor. They also want to prove that they can live side by side with the white family. They also address the transformation of the challenges of an older generation of working poor African Americans in comparison to the Youngers generation's challenges.

A Raisin in the Sun invites controversy in society. It invites pro and contra. Many people interest with this movie because this movie raises the

deep education about the dignity of the family, racial and economic. This movie also shows the excellent act from all of the stars, with taking place in 1959. Joanne Ostrow of the *Denver Post* said, “Overall, this *Raisin* is a proud, important addition to the history of stage adaptations for TV, one that could touch many more millions of people than ever saw the play, thanks both to its star power and the reach of the medium”. Besides that In *Entertainment Weekly*, Ken Tucker rated the production B+ and called it “a model of subtle adaptation.”

Nevertheless, *A Raisin in the Sun* invites some contra; one of them was noted by *The Hollywood Reporter* said, “*A Raisin in the Sun* never totally transcends its origins on the stage and it’s a long way from cutting edge cinema”. While Matt-E said that, “I think that music was from the trailer for Elizabeth the Golden Age”. Matt-E guess that *A Raisin in the Sun* movie use music from the trailer for Elizabeth Golden Age.

A Raisin in the Sun produced in two versions, February 25, 2008 on TV versions and May 13, 2008 on DVD versions. According to *Nielsen Media Research*, the program was watched by 12.7 million viewers and ranked #9 in the ratings for the week ending March 2, 2008. It spends budget 1,5 million dollars. In *Entertainment Weekly*, Ken Tucker rated the production B+ and called it “a model of subtle adaptation”.

During this film released, this movie got many nominations and awards. It was nominated for Golden Globe. This movie was nominated for the *Emmy Award for Outstanding Made for Television Movie* but lost to

Recount. Phylicia Rashad was nominated *Outstanding Lead Actress In A Miniseries or A Movie* but lost to Laura Linney for *hn Adams*. Audra McDonald was nominated *Outstanding Supporting Actress In A Miniseries or A Movie* but lost to Eileen Atkins for *Cranford*. *A Raisin in the Sun* also receives four Tony Award Nominations, *Best Revival of a Play*, *Best Performance by a Leading Actress* for Phylicia Rashad, *Best Performance by a Featured Actress* for Sanaa Lathan and *Best Performance by a Featured Actress* for Audra McDonald.

A Raisin in the Sun is the best adapted movie from the play and the teleplay. Kenny Leon, who directed this movie, describes the racial discrimination faced by African American set in Chicago 1959. Besides that this movie also describes the economic condition. There are four points that make this movie interesting to be analyzed. Firstly, *A Raisin in the Sun* describes racial discrimination of African American family and white family. Younger family is black African American family. Their life was so poor. In the history of the world Negro or black people always assumed as the poor people. They get minority in their society, because they are not American Indian. They just emigrate from Africa to America. But they are still respecting their origin cultures of Africa. They have tried to be rich people as the white family. Younger family wants to prove to the world that the black people (Negro) can be rich people and can stay life side by side. With their limited money they try to prove it. In the end of this movie, they can prove that Negro has also self respect and can life side by side with the white family.

This movie becomes motivator for the black family so that they not only as the viewer of this film but also can be part of the world.

Secondly, *A Raisin in the Sun* reflects cultural values of African American people in America. *A Raisin in the Sun* describes the condition of African American family who move to the America and staying in there for along time. While African American families share many features with other American families, the African American family has some distinctive features relating to the timing and approaches to marriage and family formation, gender roles, parenting styles, and strategies for coping with adversity. Three different sets of forces are used to account for the dynamics and structure of the contemporary African American family are integration into family life of cultural practices adapted from West Africa, structural adaptation to slavery and the last is past and current discrimination and economic inequality. African American family always assumed as labor or slave. They life during slavery as a part of the control mechanism of slavery was to strip African Americans of identity, language, and the culture of their homeland. This was done by undermining and replacing family structures with transient ones built around identity as slaves. Further, when slaves were able to secure their freedom, they often worked to get money to buy the freedom of their spouse and children.

Thirdly, *A Raisin in the Sun* gives spirit to keep the dignity in family and how to solve the problem together in family. It also shows of how standing by long term family goals and values provides a sense of unity that

can overcome any obstacle and keep the pride of the family alive. Younger family, an African American family has the big problem in their economic. Walter, as the head of this family want to reduce their poverty by joined in a business with a lot of money. But they all lie. Their money was lost. This condition makes their inharmonic. Although they all in poverty condition, but they can keep their love and dignity. They can show that Money is not a key to get happiness. The poverty is not the end of this life.

Fourthly, *A Raisin in the Sun* describes social background of America in 1959. The decades of the 1940s and 1950s brought numerous transformations to the public American life. One of the most noteworthy transformations that were triggered during this period due to the Second World War was the migration of a large portion of African Americans from the Southern agrarian states to the Northern urban cities. This large inundation of the black race did not pass by without opposition. *A Raisin in the Sun* describes the blacks comes from Africa; it is called African American people. They move to America to get better life as the worker. African American people do not get the best place in America. They work as the labor to the American people. They get minorities, and the Native American inhabitant people being conqueror. This differentiation is influence of society life. The most influence is the discrimination in economic and racial. The African American people, who called black people, always become poor or lower class. While American people, who called White people, always become a rich people.

According to those reasons, the writer would like to analyze the racial discrimination based on the Marxist perspective. The writer will employ a Marxist approach to analyze this movie, because a Marxist approach is suitable to analyze this movie. The writer takes this research entitled **RACIAL DISCRIMINATION REFLECTED IN KENNY LEON'S A RAISIN IN THE SUN MOVIE (2008): A MARXIST APPROACH.**

B. Literature Review

There is researcher who studies on *A Raisin in the Sun* with the entitled "The Ideas of American Dream as the Main Character's Motive of Life." It was written by Danita Irianti Malute (2008: Sanata Dharma University). This study focuses on the ideas American dream as the main character's motive of life. The result of this study is shows that an African American people have a dream to get better life. He makes into his dream to be motive life. His dream is to be rich people. He was doing whatever to follow his dream. His dream appears when he felt that he can cover the needed of his family.

Second researcher is Kumalsari (2004: Sanata Dharma University) entitled "The Idea of Feminism Reflected in the Female Character A Raisin in the Sun". This study focuses on the idea of feminism reflected in the female character. The result of this study is feminism can be shown by the female character. *A Raisin in the Sun* and Beneatha displayed traits of supporters of this social theory through her need to express herself by rediscovering her roots, her defiance of her brother and other males in the play, and her

optimistic stance when facing the troubles of entering a male-dominated profession.

The researchers above are different from the present writer. The first difference is the issues that being analyzed. The research above analyzes about the American dream as the main character's motive of life main and the second research analyze the idea of feminism but the writer here will be analyzed about racial discrimination reflected in *A Raisin in the Sun* movie. The second difference is the literary work that being analyze. The researchers above uses the literary work a play entitled *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry's version but the writer here used literary work by Kenny Leon movie version with the same title *A Raisin in the Sun*. The similarities between the research above and the writer here is uses the same literary work entitled *A Raisin in the Sun*.

C. Problem Statement

The major problem in this study is "How is racial discrimination reflected in Kenny Leon's *A Raisin in the Sun* movie?"

D. Limitation of the Study

The limitation of the study is how racial discrimination reflected in *A Raisin in the Sun* movie, especially viewed by Marxist. The researcher uses Marxist to analyze the movie because this approach is suitable to draw the major condition during the period within the movie.

E. Objective of the Study

Dealing with the problem statement above, the objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To analyze the film based on the structural elements.
2. To analyze the film based on the Marxist approach.

F. Benefit of the Study

1. Theoretical Benefit

The result of this study is expected to be able to give theoretical contribution in the literature study, particularly psychological study on literature about the Marxist theory.

2. Practical Benefit

Hopefully, this study can give knowledge about the Marxist.

G. Research Method

1. Type of the Study

In analyzing *A Raisin in the Sun* movie, the researcher uses descriptive qualitative research. Descriptive qualitative is a type of research which result the descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from the observed object.

2. Type of the Data and the Data Sources

a. Type of Data

The data of this study are scenes and dialogue in *A Raisin in the Sun* movie by Kenny Leon.

b. Data Source

- 1) Primary Data Source is the film and script of *A Raisin in the Sun* movie directed by Kenny Leon which is related to the study.
- 2) Secondary Data Source is the biography of the author, the websites in the internet about the movie, *A Raisin in the Sun* movie by Kenny Leon and the other resources that support to analyze.

3. Object of the Study

The object of this study is *A Raisin in the Sun*, directed by Kenny Leon which was produced in February 25, 2008.

4. Technique of the Data Collection

The method of data collection in this study is documentation. The writer views the primary data repeatedly to reach more understanding of source. Next, the writer takes, compares, quotes, and studies other data into some categories and develops them into a good unity.

5. Technique of the Data Analysis

The first step in analyzing the data of this research is clarifying the obtained data by selecting the necessary ones. Secondary steps are analyzing data based on Marxism theory.

H. Research Paper Organization

This researcher systematizes this research into five chapters. Chapter I is Introduction, which consist of background of the study, literary review, problem statement, limitation of the study, objective of the study, benefit of the study, theoretical approach, research method, and research paper organization. Chapter II comprises of the underlying theory, which presents Notion of Marxism, Basic Concept of Marxism, Structural Elements of the Movie and Theoretical Application. Chapter III is Social Background of American Society. Chapter IV is Structural Analysis of the movie, which includes structural elements of character and characterization, setting, point of view, plot, style, theme and discussion. Chapter V is Marxism Analysis related to the problem. Chapter VI is Conclusion and Suggestion.